



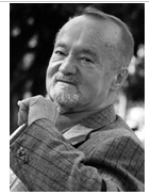
5.9 Toulmin’s critique of conventional logical form

Introduction

The British philosopher, Stephen Toulmin (1958) proposed a model of argumentation which attempts to describe what often happens when we formulate an argument. Toulmin claims that an argument cannot be considered valid purely on the basis of its form. The Toulmin model shows that as an argument develops by adding more evidence, its logical structure does not necessarily conform to the strict rules of classical deductive or inductive logic. Toulmin wanted us to think more about what happens in practical situations, not just stay at the abstract level of a simplified description of arguments. One of Toulmin’s important claims is that arriving at a conclusion is not “field-invariant”. This means that different areas of study will require different methods. For example, arguments in the fields of psychology, mathematics or law will all have their preferred methods of arguing, developed over time in their respective disciplinary contexts.

An argument is like an organism. It has a gross, anatomical structure and a finer, as-it-were physiological one...The time has come to change the focus of our enquiry, and to concentrate on this finer level.

Stephen Toulmin (1958, 94)



(image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Toulmin)

Toulmin’s model of argumentation

Toulmin’s model of argumentation is clearly explained in the following video:



Toulmin’s Logical Method

- “argument fields”
- “field-dependent”
- “field-dependent”

[The Toulmin Model of Argument](#) (start 3 mins, 45 secs – end 11 mins, 46 secs)

The basic Toulmin model - at a glance

Data	The evidence used to support a claim
Warrant	A reason or principle used to connect the data with the claim
Claim	sameness & difference



The Toulmin model – an example

Data	All members of the family were granted refugee status by the American government.
Warrant	The law provides that all those granted refugee status may apply for American citizenship.
Claim	Presumably, all members of the family have the legal right to apply for American citizenship.

Note that in the above example, the word ‘presumably’ is used. Words like ‘presumably’, ‘probably’, ‘possibly’ indicate that an element of uncertainty is allowed for, and reflect what actually happens in many complex situations where extra information and evidence is continually being added. The scope of the problem is modified when further ‘complicating factors’ are taken into account, as shown below:

Data	All members of the family were granted refugee status by the American government. (Complicating factor: one family member has a criminal record.)
Warrant	The law provides that all those granted refugee status may apply for American citizenship. (Complicating factor: those with criminal records may not apply for citizenship.)
Claim	Presumably, all members of the family have the legal right to apply for American citizenship. (Complicating factor: except, presumably, the member with the criminal record)

Summing up, it is clear that Toulmin’s approach adds an important perspective to the ways in which we can understand different possibilities for structuring and analysing arguments.